



Town of Groton, Connecticut

45 Fort Hill Road
Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Meeting Minutes

Representative Town Meeting

Moderator Scott L. Newsome, Representatives Karin Adams, Robert Bailey, Jeanne Baker, Joe Baril, Alicia T. Bauer, Rafael Burgos, Jr., Clarence Casper, Lynn Crockett Hubbard, Susan Deane-Shinbrot, Jim Evans, Thomas A. Frickman, Bob Garcia, Nancy Gilly, Frederick S. Kent, Matthew G. Longino, Jim Loughlin, Emily Maher, Brandon Marley, Jackie Massett, Lisa McCabe, Bruce A. McDermott, Roscoe L. Merritt, Jim Nault, Kathy Neugent, Lian Obrey, Juliette M. Parker, Richard J. Pasqualini, Jr., Shawn D. Powers, Carolann Quinn, Dutcha Sliker-Hersant, Joan Steinfeld, Irma J. Streeter, James L. Streeter, Archie Swindell, Patricia Wagner, Lori A. Watrous, Gary Welles, Ivy R. Williams, and Jonathan Wilson.

Wednesday, February 8, 2017

7:30 PM

Groton Senior Center

REGULAR MEETING

Moderator Scott Newsome called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

A. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Moderator Newsome, Rep. Adams, Rep. Bailey, Rep. Baker, Rep. Baril, Rep. Kent, Rep. Deane-Shinbrot, Rep. Evans, Rep. Frickman, Rep. Massett, Rep. McCabe, Rep. Merritt, Rep. Neugent, Rep. Parker, Rep. Pasqualini Jr., Rep. Powers, Rep. Quinn, Rep. Steinfeld, Rep. Streeter, Rep. Streeter, Rep. Sliker-Hersant, Rep. Swindell, Rep. Welles and Rep. Wilson

Members Absent: Rep. Bauer, Rep. Burgos, Jr., Rep. Casper, Rep. Hubbard, Rep. Garcia, Rep. Gilly, Rep. Longino, Rep. Loughlin, Rep. Maher, Rep. Marley, Rep. McDermott, Rep. Nault, Rep. Obrey, Rep. Wagner, Rep. Watrous and Rep. Williams

Moderator Newsome stated that 24 members were present and he declared a quorum.

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Michael Graner, Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher and Town Clerk Office Assistant II Michael Thorpe.

B. MOMENT OF SILENCE AND SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The members observed a moment of silence followed by the Salute to the Flag.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF JANUARY 11, 2017

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Rep. Wilson, seconded by Rep. Parker and so voted unanimously.

D. CITIZENS' PETITIONS

None.

E. RECEPTION OF COMMUNICATIONS

Moderator Newsome noted that due to work-related considerations Rep. Quinn will no longer be available to chair the RTM Finance Committee. Rep. Nault has been assigned to chair the RTM Finance Committee.

The Moderator assigned Rep. Kent to the Education Committee to replace Rep. DeMatto and Rep. Powers to the Finance Committee to replace Rep. Conley.

Moderator Newsome mentioned that the search for a new chair for the Community Development Committee is ongoing and may require shifting some personnel.

Moderator Newsome read and referred two resolutions to transfer funds from the General Fund Contingency to the Finance Committee. He stated that he would inform Rep. Nault of these two referrals.

Moderator Newsome reported that Reps. McDermott, Marley, Burgos, Casper, Wagner, Nault and Obrey had informed him of their absence.

F. REPORT OF THE TOWN MANAGER

1. Financial report

Town Manager Mark Oefinger reported that the Fund Balance as of January 31, 2017 was approximately \$9.9 million which represents 8.1% of the FYE 2017 adopted budget. He stated that the Town's stated objective to maintain a Fund Balance of at least 7.7%. He reported that the FYE 2017 General Contingency was appropriated at \$425,000 with a current balance of \$352,210. He stated that there have been approved transfers of \$72,690. He stated that the approved transfers are listed in the Town Manager's News. He reported that the Capital Reserve Fund balance as of January 31, 2017 was \$1.5 million..

2. Monthly briefing

Town Manager Mark Oefinger announced that Aircraft Owners & Pilots Association will hold an event at the Groton New London Airport on October 6th and 7th. He stated that there is a article in the Town Manager's News that explains this event. He stated that the organization is looking for volunteers. Town Manager Mark Oefinger announced that the Groton Public Library is now formally a Passport Acceptance Facility. He stated that staff have been trained to process new applications and renewal applications for passports. Town Manager Mark Oefinger reported that the LED Street lighting Project is moving ahead, He stated that the Eversource franchise area of the community, approximately everything east of RT. 117 is in the Eversource service area. He stated that the Town owns the street lights and that we have contracted Tanko to swap out the old streetlight with the new LED street lights. He stated that Tanko started work on February 6th, 2017 on the 1300 street lights and that they should be finished within the next couple of weeks. Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that the January Economic Development Update is included in the Town Manager's news tagged as Attachment 2. Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that we have been contacted by the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments, which is Attachment 4, that they are in the process of updating and finalizing the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development. He stated that there are a couple of workshops planned in the future including in the Town of Groton. Town Manager Mark Oefinger mentioned that CCM is conducting a training session on February 16, 2017 at the Groton Senior Center. The program will be focused on customer service for Municipal personnel. He stated that the Town is a member of CCM and that members of the RTM may attend by registering with CCM. Town Manager Mark Oefinger reported that the Governor announced his proposed budget today that includes a significant cut to the Town of Groton. He stated that the Town receives a fair amount of money from the State on an annual basis. He stated that the vast majority of those funds are for education. He stated that there are others things that we get funding for. He stated that in the current year, we are expected to receive \$29.5 million in state funding. He stated that under the Governor's proposal for next year, that amount will be reduced by about \$13 million. He stated that this is a significant reduction of about 44%. He stated that a vast majority of that is in Education Cost Sharing Grants (ECS). He stated that the Town receives \$25 million in ECS funding and under the Governor's proposal we will receive \$10 million. He stated that this is a significant blow to the Town's financial situation. He stated that this is only a proposal. He stated that 75 to 80% of the communities have a proposed reduction, but that there are a handful of communities that receive more funding. He stated as an example, Hartford is proposed to receive \$47 million, Waterbury \$43 million and New Britain \$28 million. A \$13 million cut, with a mill being worth \$3.5 million, this reduction would amount to a 3 or 4 mill impact. He stated that he will keep the RTM up to date as he receives more information. He stated that the Town relies on the funds proposed from the State in order to build the Town budget. He stated that this may not be how the budget is developed this year. He stated that the Town Council will probably be meeting with the Legislators in the coming week in order to better understand the issue.

Moderator Scott Newsome stated that \$13 million, with an approximate current education budget

of \$76 million, is roughly 17% or almost \$1 in \$5. He stated that this is catastrophic. He stated that in the same newspaper article, New London is proposed to receive an extra \$10 million. He stated that \$13 million away from us and give New London \$10 million. He stated that more information is to come, but that he wanted RTM members to put some of these numbers into perspective.

Moderator Scott Newsome open the floor for question to the Town Manager.

In response to Rep. Wilson, Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that the Library will receive \$35 as a fee for processing passport application, which will be considered revenue.

In response to Rep. Swindell, Town Manager Mark Oefinger, stated that staff has been working on disposing of two parcels out on RT 184 and the next property that they will work on is Groton Heights. He stated that the town had received a couple of inquiries. He stated that it has not been decided whether to pursue any zone changes or to simply offer the property for sale. He stated that the oil tank has been removed and that a fair amount of environmental work has been done on this site. He stated that the town has a lot of good information that could be given to a prospective buyer that wasn't available six months ago. He confirmed that most of the inquiries for the property were for residential use. Rep. Swindell stated that there may be an opportunity for mixed use and that he will continue to ask questions at every meeting.

In response to Rep. Neugent, Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that next year, \$6.7 million is proposed in the Governors's budget for Special Education.

In response to Rep. Massett, Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that the towns are to assume one third of teacher's retirement contribution. He stated this amount is proposed to be \$3.9 million, and that no decision has been made regarding placement in the budget.

G. REPORT ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The report was included in the Town Manager's New.

H. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

In response to Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Superintendent Dr. Michael Graner stated that funding for Special Education is a stand alone account. Dr. Graner stated that he received the Governor's proposed budget today and that it is a decrease of \$13 million from the ECS grant. He stated that in addition, there is a \$1 million excess cost grant that would be eliminated. He stated that this is the amount of money the town spends over a cap that the state use to have. With the elimination of that grant, the proposed reduction is actually \$14 million. He stated that the proposal for the municipality is to pay one third of the teacher's pension. He stated that this has been the State's responsibility for decades. He stated that teachers and administrators pay 7.25 % of their income to the pensions account, because they are not eligible for Social Security. He stated that the State matches that amount. He stated that from 1980 through 2008 the state did not fully fund this pension account. He stated that billions of dollars have not been funded into the pension account. He stated that if we combine the \$4 million pension liability with the \$14 million proposed cut, we actually are looking at a \$18 million cut. He stated that this cut is not sustainable and that it will destabilize our community. He stated that the entire region is effected and that this will lead to the reduction and lay off of thousands of teachers and administrators. He stated that this reduction would be about a 20% reduction of the Education budget. He illustrated several scenarios for achieving the reductions through layoffs. Dr. Graner announced a press conference for Senator Somers that will be held at the School Administration Office at 9:00 and she extended an invitation to members of the RTM.

Rep. Swindell stated that one of the Town Manager's suggestions was to understand the reason why these cuts are being made. He questioned if it was time to start looking at combining school districts. He stated that one of the advantages of Connecticut is that it has hundreds of inefficient

school districts. While this is great for the kids and local control, but its unique in the nation. Consolidation of schools, consolidation of town services, we have three police departments in a town of 40,000. He stated that we have two complete independent Public Works Departments. He stated that we have room to economize. He stated that he believes that it is time to start studying this seriously.

Dr. Michael Graner stated that when he had heard that the Governor was going to use Husky Health Care enrollment as the measure for calculating the Education Cost Sharing grant, he knew there would be problems. He stated that 23% of the children in our school system are military dependents and they are not eligible for the Husky program. Those 1200 children have access to the military health care system. He stated that we get \$3.5 million from the U.S. Federal Government in lieu of taxes to pay for educating the military children. He stated that if it costs about \$14,000 per child, then it is about a \$14 million expense to educate these children.

In response to Rep. Dean-Shinbrot, Dr. Michael Graner stated that the Education Cost Sharing grant program, which began in the late 1970's, used an extremely complicated formula. He stated that he knew that the formula was not being used since he began working as an administrator eighteen years ago. He stated that the legislature continued to provide the same grant amount every year, and occasionally increase the base amount if there was extra funds available. He stated that he new that there was no formula being used because of the discrepancies of funding between similar communities and stated that a formula doesn't exist because it isn't applied. He stated that the current Husky enrollment formula being used was an attempt by the Governor's staff to try to determine the relative wealth of families through out the state. He stated that there are all kinds of anomalies to that. He stated that Groton is at a huge disadvantage if this formula is used. He stated that any formula needs to be more comprehensive than that.

In response to Rep. Wilson, Dr. Michael Graner stated that the Legislature passed a law last year that allows municipalities to cut budgets by the amount that the ECS grant is cut. He stated that if our ECS grant is reduced by \$15 million, then the budget can be reduced by that amount.

Rep. Wilson thanked Dr. Graner and stated that he did not mean to put him on the spot. He stated that he was transferred here in 1979 while serving in the military. He stated that he had children in the school system and he was required to fill out the Impact Aid forms every year. He stated that he felt as though this cut is a slap to the military families that the ECS grant is being reduced because the military children are here.

In response to Re. Wilson, Dr. Michael Graner stated that it isn't the military children, it is the formula that is flawed.

Moderator Newsome stated that this is the top of the first inning. He stated that he has a lot of confidence in the Town Manager and the Superintendent of Schools in keeping a close eye on how things progress. He stated that we will stay on top of it.

I. LIAISON REPORTS

No report

Rep. Parker departed, 23 members present..

J. COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. FINANCE - Chairman Quinn

2016-0291 Request for Donation for Thames River Heritage Park Water Taxi (FYE 2018)

REQUEST FOR DONATION FOR THAMES RIVER HERITAGE PARK WATER TAXI (FYE 2018)

A motion was made by Moderator Newsome, seconded by Rep. Pasqualini Jr., that this matter be

Adopted.

Moderator Newsome referenced the RTM rules and stated that the Finance Committee did not have a quorum at their meeting. He stated that he would place the item on the floor.

In response to Rep. Wilson, Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that the funds would be used to cover the operating expenses to run the water taxis. He stated that this would be the second full year of operations. He stated that the desire of the Committee is to get out in front of the season and let people know that the program is running during such time as determined. He stated that this is why the request is being made now instead of in May. He stated that they need to know what their revenues will be in order to put the program together. He announced that the Committee was able to secure two boats from the Navy. He stated that the boats were free but that they need to be maintained. He stated that the Committee has a contract with an operator for the boats. He stated that these funds will be used for operating cost, signage and payment for the operator.

Rep. Wilson stated that the requests for funds is disproportionate of the three requests, one to New London and two to Groton. He stated that Groton is paying two thirds and that we have less to benefit from the water taxi than New London.

In response to Rep. Wilson, Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that this was the same request that was made in previous years. He stated that there are three main communities involved, the City of New London, the City of Groton, and the Town of Groton. He stated that a lot of people have raised this issue over the months, but that this is the way it was formulated. The City has been a very active participant in the Heritage Park. He stated that this is one of those idiosyncrasies of Groton, sometime we want to be considered one and sometimes we want to be considered two. He said that he personally believes this money to be well spent. He compared this proposal to the Mystic bus shuttle and that the program got going too late in the season every year. He stated that lessons need to be learned from the past. He stated that people need to know that the program is ongoing and predictable. He stated that the tourism magazine articles are being written now for this coming season. He stated that it is important that the Committee have the funds secured so that they can put together a schedule for these publications.

Rep. Wilson offered his insights and that the Water Taxi Committee has a plan to expand the route up to the Sub Base. He stated that this would be extremely difficult simply because of security and the cost involved in building out a pier for landing. He stated that he sees that the taxi does benefit the City of New London. He stated that he sees that it has the potential to benefit the City of Groton. He stated that he didn't see it benefiting the Town of Groton as much because of where we are. He stated whether it is this year or years to come, he does not see his support going forward for it.

Rep. J. Streeter mentioned that the City of New London and the City of Groton are going to benefit from this. He stated that the City of Groton is part of the Town of Groton. He stated that the Town of Groton is also going to benefit. He stated that the Economic Development Commission is using this program as encouragement to develop business on Thames Street. He stated that in the long run, this will benefit the entire Town. He stated that we encourage and assist businesses in Mystic because it is part of the Town. He stated that the City is part of the Town, too.

Rep. Neugent stated that she is a resident of the Town and not the City and that she benefited from it. She stated that she enjoyed a trip with a couple of middle school grand kids. She stated that they had a great day visiting the Forts and learning American History. She stated that they visited Fort Trumbull and discussed the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and Electric Boat's contributions to World War II. She stated that it is a lot of fun to be out on the water and it is a reasonable cost. She encouraged everyone to take advantage of it next summer. She stated that

this is another good example of regional cooperation. She stated that the area hotel could run shuttles to the dock. She stated that she supports it.

Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that it has always been a desire to have the water taxi be able to go up to the Sub Force Museum. He stated that there had been plans, fifteen years ago, that the Navy had signed off on, the Museum had signed off on, and the plans are now being reviewed to determine what other approvals are necessary. He stated that there had been a substantial amount of approved funding to build the dock. He stated that those funds have been reallocated across the river. He stated that his understanding is that the Navy and the Sub Force Museum would like to see the water taxi dock built off the Nautilus pier. He stated that the Captain has stated that the dock could be used for security in some future exercise. He stated that the funding is unknown at this point. He stated that in his mind we are all one Groton and that Groton is Groton. He stated that Thames Street development is an important part of the community. He stated that it is within the City's jurisdiction and zoning, but that we want to be helpful and to encourage good things to happen. He stated that he suspects that most people using the water taxi are starting over in New London. He stated that they are coming to Groton to see something. He stated that we could benefit greatly if we could get our act together and start to put some of the building blocks together on Thames Street, and up at the Nautilus and up Military Highway. He stated that the original vision of the Heritage Park was a conceptual thing, a necklace of pearls and the string is the Thames River. He stated that the water taxi is critical to the success of that concept. He stated that all three communities are represented on the governing body. He stated that it will take a couple of years to get the program up and running with more to offer than just special events and weekend rides. He stated that he thinks it is a good thing that the Town and the City are putting in money. He stated that this is a \$200,000 plus operation and \$30,000 is not going to go far. He stated that the budget last years was around \$195,000 and this year's is about \$225,000. He stated that ridership last year was a couple thousand. He stated that with more ridership the program will grow.

Moderator Newsome read a letter from Thames River Heritage Park. The letter is on file in the Town Clerk's Office.

Rep, Frickman stated that he agrees with the concept, but that if we are truly one Groton, then we should only be paying one price. He stated that in the future, he hopes that the City of New London will pay one price and Groton will pay one price. He stated that he supports the whole concept and that he will support the motion tonight.

In response to Rep. Bailey, Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that he didn't think to invite anyone from the Thames River Heritage Park or the water taxi. He stated that the author of the letter that the Moderator read has died, Chris Cox. He stated that this will only be the second year of the program and that there really isn't any statistical trends to report. He stated that the requested budget of \$237,000, \$36,500 is for boat prep and maintenance, \$40,000 is for marketing, \$17,000 is for insurance, the operator is being paid \$63,000, \$13,000 for administration, \$54,000 for the Executive Director of the Foundation, and \$12,000 for interns. The revenues that are anticipated are \$5,000 in sponsorships, Municipal contribution of \$30,000, and ticket sales \$19,500. He stated that the Legislator will be looking into a contribution from the State of around \$70,000.

In response to Rep. Bailey, Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that he thinks that the committee has done a great job. This project has been in the works since 1987. He stated that having boats in the water is tremendous progress. He stated that this is \$10,000 well spent and he certainly would encourage the RTM to approve it.

Rep. Kent stated that he looks at this as something nice to have, but a frill. He stated that it represents yet again more mission creep. He stated the he does not see this as a government

function. He stated that he see this as private enterprise. He stated that the ticket sales only cover 8% of the cost. He stated that this is a money pit. He stated that at the start of the meeting, we are already potentially \$13 million in the hole. He stated that private enterprise should do it, if it is worth doing.

In response to Rep. Evans, Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that he didn't have any information regarding data on the ridership.

Rep Evans stated that he experienced the water taxi last year and he spent more time in New London. He stated that people who came from New London to Groton were intimidated with the hill at Fort Griswold. He stated that these people got back on the boat and went back to New London. He stated that he wonders if this was really a benefit for Groton. He stated that he would prefer that Groton as a whole pay half of the funding and New London pay the other half.

Rep. Neugent stated that in response to another comment that this is important for Economic Development. She urges people to support this. She stated that she agrees that more needs to be done to promote Groton. She stated that there is an easy way up to the Fort and that more signs are needed. She stated that there are historical houses. She stated that she would be really disappointed if we didn't support this for another year. She urged the members to support it.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 16 - Moderator Newsome, Rep. Adams, Rep. Baker, Rep. Baril, Rep. Frickman, Rep. Massett, Rep. McCabe, Rep. Merritt, Rep. Neugent, Rep. Pasqualini Jr., Rep. Powers, Rep. Streeter, Rep. Streeter, Rep. Sliker-Hersant, Rep. Swindell and Rep. Welles
Opposed: 5 - Rep. Bailey, Rep. Kent, Rep. Evans, Rep. Quinn and Rep. Wilson
Abstain: 2 - Rep. Deane-Shinbrot and Rep. Steinfeld
Non-voting: 1 - Rep. Parker

2. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & SERVICES -

No meeting, no report.

3. EDUCATION - Chairman Neugent

No meeting, no report.

4. RECREATION - Chairman Wilson

No meeting, no report.

5. PUBLIC SAFETY - Chairman McDermott

No meeting, no report.

6. PUBLIC WORKS - Chairman Deane-Shinbrot

No meeting, no report.

7. RULES & PROCEDURES - Chairman Massett

No meeting, no report.

K. BUDGET DISCUSSIONS

Moderator Scott Newsome stated that the budget process is fast approaching. He stated that there will be information regarding the process going out soon.

L. OTHER BUSINESS

Rep. Massett stated that she would like to have a representative of the Charter Revision Commission to update the RTM as to where they are in the process.

Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher provided some information to include that the Charter Revision Commission meets twice a month on the first and third Monday or as needed. She stated that the next meeting will be on February 13, 2017 at the Town Hall Annex in Community Room 2 at 6:30

p.m. She stated the they are scheduled to vote on the structure of government at this meeting.

M. ADJOURNMENT

Rep. Pasqualini called for the adjournment, seconded by Rep. Wilson. Moderator Newsome declared the adjournment at 9:00 p.m.

Attest:

*Betsy Moukawsher, Town Clerk
Clerk of the RTM*

Michael Thorpe, Town Clerk Office Assistant II